

Supplementary – two

Messages from the Sea?

One of the more baffling aspects of the loss of *Sydney* is the interception by members of No. 4 SFTS of morse signals during the night of 19 November. While authors such as Winter believe that the signals actually came from Sydney (the place) and were not heard until early December, their failure is significant in that they have never explained the content of the signals.

In recent years, the late Squadron Leader Eric Cooper, formerly of No 4 SFTS has revealed that he was informed by a Corporal Dawson of 4 SFTS, that he and a colleague had intercepted morse signals while listening to a short wave radio broadcast heard at the Geraldton Hostel during the night of 19 November. At no time did he claim that what he heard were radio transmissions - nor that he had a dedicated station to listen and scan the airwaves – this has been intruded into his report to the training air base by others. During the night of 19 November F/O Gerry Bogue was acting as Adjutant of 4 SFTS. He received the messages from Dawson and called Squadron Leader Cooper. Between them they put together a message to be sent to Perth and sent it in the early hours of 20 November. Two handwritten documents have been found in RAAF archives which contain versions of what Cooper and Bogue sent.

Cooper's information may never have been made public had it not been for the late Group Captain C A V Bourne contacting him and asking that Cooper relate what he knew about the 19 November. When informed about what the SWACH log contained, Cooper was anxious to set the record straight and committed what he knew to paper in the form of a statutory declaration. It was later admitted to the WA Parliament by Hon. J Scott who had received it from one of his constituents, John Doohan, a friend of Bourne.

Bourne made clear that Cooper knew more than he ever committed to paper and was of the opinion that Cooper having revealed his actions on the night of 19 November did not want to answer any more questions. As for Bogue, Bourne contacted him but to no avail.

Station records for the squadron reveal that senior intelligence members of the three Services had arrived in Geraldton from Perth during the 19 November. No record exists of their departure. Nor for that matter has there been any discussion about their purpose in Geraldton. Cooper's claims that he did not know they were there have to be treated with suspicion. The question is why did he not want to talk about them?

The only certainty about the signals from the sea is that they were heard by Dawson and notes of them taken by Cooper and Bogue on the night of 19 November. How and why they appeared in SWACH records from 4-6 December is a question that cannot be simplistically answered by claiming them to have originated from Sydney Aeradio.